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SUBJECT: Sudan/Unity State: Sources of Fragility

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Summary and Comment

11. USAID staff visited Rubkona/Bentiu from February 19-22, 2006. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has significantly improved security as the militia groups that dominated the area during the war have integrated into the SPLA. However, a number of factors threaten the uneasy peace: a dispute over the border with South Kordofan and thus the revenues of the lucrative Heglig oil field, the migration of Jagra (Liw3ipm) nomads-qnd\$5hc1dc2g0beczQ_gz'QupNok`kh@-BcQ`% udo,^Q^c4QH+albe\$E`U3Q7QQ5e it clear that he was "counting on USAID" to provide humanitarian assistance while the SPLM "takes care of the army." Capacity in the area for community-based organizations to manage a humanitarian response is also very weak, making it difficult for the small international NGO community to expand their work rapidly. Provision of potable water is the most urgent need, especially in the urban and peri-urban zones, in addition to a food aid package to carry returnees up through the next harvest. A strong injection of energy and expertise is needed from the humanitarian community to support the reintegration of the returnees, while dialogue with the state government on what it will contribute to the process must continue. End summary and comment.

Brief Background

13. USAID staff (Senior Humanitarian Advisor and FSN IDP focal point) visited Unity State from February 19-22, 2006, to investigate reports of large number of returnees to the northern part of the state and to examine factors of fragility as part of an ongoing exercise to fine tune the DCHA programming in Sudan (Note: visits have already been made to the Nuba Mountains, Abyei, Twic County, Bor, and Wau/Aweil - ongoing). During the visit, the team traveled to Abiemnon in Mayom County, near the border with Warrap State and South Kordofan/Abyei, and to a fishing village along the White Nile in the oil fields to visit a group of fishermen who are benefiting from USAID funding. The delegation held meetings with GoSS authorities, traditional leaders, and community-based organizations as well as the UN agencies and NGOs operating in the area.

14. Unity State comprises an estimated population of 587,639 based on the WFP Annual Needs Assessment of 2005. Approximately 75 percent of the population is Nuer, and the remaining part Dinka and other tribes. There are 9 counties under the current administrative system, with the Governor (Taban Deng) based in Bentiu along with his state cabinet. A tributary of the nearby White Nile, the Bahr el Ghazal River, flows through the town, dividing Rubkona (where NGOs live and work and the location of the airport) and Bentiu town (seat of government). A new bridge has recently been constructed by one of the oil companies linking the two cities. The tributary as well as the Nile are heavily clogged by papyrus and water lily in this area and have been unnavigable since 2004. Unity State is rich in oil and fertile land, but the population depends heavily on humanitarian assistance due to the insecurity endured during the war.

Rubkona/Bentiu Transformed by Peace

15. The peace accord has brought about a level of security unknown by the population of the state during

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the war. The South Sudan Independence Movement (SSIM) and South Sudan Unity Movement (SSUM) SSIM and SSUM militia have been absorbed into the SPLA, guns are no longer evident on the streets, and gunshots no longer interrupt the night. Random taxation by armed groups is a thing of the past, although government-imposed taxes remain. The curfew is lifted and the population is free to move around between the two cities throughout the day and night. The market in Rubkona is filled with goods,

including furniture, clothing, watches, and sunglasses, in addition to food items. Although expensive, and not much evidence of wide-scale purchasing by the local population, the mere presence of so many merchants and goods shows there was some confidence within the private sector. (Note: As a security measure, the GoSS is staffing security posts at the market edges following a spike of violence that included destruction of some stalls in the market, after the death of John Garang in late July. A significant number of traders in the market are Zaghawa from Darfur. End note.) During the team's visit, a huge dredger was cutting away the papyrus and water lily to open up the river. According to the governor, the rivers, both the White Nile and the tributary, will be clear by the end of the month, permitting a resumption of water traffic into the state.

Sources of Fragility

¶6. The most pressing issue threatening stability in Unity State is the row over the northern border with South Kordofan/Abyei. At stake is the siting of the well-head of the lucrative Heglig oil field. The state owning the well would receive 2 percent of the revenues. According to the local authorities, the border of Unity State per the 1956 maps that are the guide for the CPA puts Heglig well into Unity State. They are very upset with the UN, which has issued maps showing Heglig outside of Unity State and as a "contested area" reflecting claims by Khartoum that Heglig is part of Abyei (and for the time being, South Kordofan due to the lack of administration in Abyei). The Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), which relied on the southern militia to protect the oil fields during the war, has recently deployed about 500 troops to the area to maintain a counterbalance to the militia who are now SPLA. Recent pronouncements from the Presidency indicate that any decision on the Unity State border will await the review of the Boundary Commission that will be looking at other border issues throughout the south. Meanwhile, the stand off continues on the ground.

¶7. Throughout the war, militia aligned to the government and the SPLA battled for control of the area and disrupted the population through banditry, harassment, and violence. As a result, the northern part of Unity State was in a persistent state of emergency throughout the war, and the few NGOs who operated in the area were often forced to evacuate or reduce staff. Keeping the militia under control will be critical to consolidating the peace. The Governor told USAID that his priority is to use any financial resource coming to the state to pay the army.

¶8. More worrying to local authorities is what they describe as a deliberate arming of Missirya nomads by the SAF. The annual migration is one time when the encounter of Arab nomads and Nuer farmers/herders can result in tensions. Traditional conflict resolution mechanisms were employed to negotiate migration routes and access to water. This time, there is concern that the Missirya are trying to lay claim to land in the area and to take over economic activities, including charcoal production, sale of poles, and forest products. The governor told USAID that a meeting between Dinka, Nuer, and Missirya was reportedly held recently near Heglig to calm tensions and that further discussions are planned.

¶9. The UN estimates that over 45,000 internally displaced persons have returned to Unity State, with most

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of them passing through a northern point at Kharasana in Pariang country and then moving on to Rubkona/Bentieu and points south or to Warrap to the west or Upper Nile and Jonglei to the east. Tracking and monitoring of returnee flows has been marred by irregular payments to enumerators, and the fact that Kharasana is in a "contested area," means that IOM has opted not to put a way station there, instead convincing the governor it should be in Bentiu town.

¶10. The team visited Abiemnon in Mayom County in the northwest of the state. The area was completely abandoned during the war and counted only 15 huts a few months ago when CARE conducted an initial assessment. Today, the small village is now a town, with a market, several thousand residents, and a local administration. A busload of returnees from Khartoum had just arrived, offering the opportunity of interviews by the USAID and CARE team. Overwhelmingly, everyone asked why he or she had returned to Unity State said it was because security had been restored. However, returnees also said that they had expected to find services in the area and were concerned to be learning that there was little to be found (Note: CARE does have a clinic and has been providing a food rations to the returnees. End note.) Because in Abiemnon and in other places there is no genuine "host population," the entire population of returnees is dependent on international assistance until the first crops can be grown.

¶11. One of the first challenges to returnees is to reclaim their original villages. Many of the villages no longer exist having been taken over by the oil companies, whose presence is significant in this area. Formal compensation plans are not yet in place, but the subject is heavily discussed by officials and the local population. The northern part of the state is heavily criss-crossed with oil roads, many of which the governor said are damaging to the environment as they were constructed without consideration for the drainage that is needed in this heavily swampy area.

¶12. Villages have also been reclaimed by heavy forest and will require extensive clearing by the population to open areas for habitation and cultivation. Some UNMIS

officials believe that the GoSS is deliberately encouraging resettlement in the northern part of the state to protect the oil fields. If the past is prologue in the South (i.e., the "Bor Wars") an aid-receiving population can be a source of sustenance for a fighting army.

Humanitarian Response Behind the Curve

¶13. The organization of the humanitarian community in Unity is not yet fully consistent with the new situation in the south. OCHA pointed out to USAID that NGOs who worked from the "southern sector" for the most part have still not established a presence in the capital of the state, a former garrison city under then-GOS control. Likewise, NGOs who served Bentiu and other GOS-controlled areas from Khartoum continue to do so largely for logistics reasons and have not yet moved their center of operations to Juba. There is a monthly coordination meeting, but OCHA indicated that not all NGOs are actively participating as yet. The small UN team in Rubkona/Bentiu needs to be reinforced to handle the growing returnee situation and the potential crises that could erupt in the area over oil and/or inter-ethnic tensions.

¶14. USAID partner CARE is off to a slow start in implementing a community based livelihoods and capacity building program for returnees that was funded in 2005. It has started a carpentry workshop, obtained land, and provided seeds for women's communal gardening, and is supporting groups of fishermen along the White Nile. The need for community organization and grass-roots driven development is high, but the implementing capacity of

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local NGOs is very weak, slowing down delivery of urgently needed skills building.

¶15. CARE has been WFP's partner in the distribution of full rations to the returnees and half rations to vulnerable groups. CARE also has a separate pipeline from USAID/WFP that it will use to target a specific community before handing over all distributions to German Agro Action. The WFP program targets a total of 103,304 food aid beneficiaries in Unity State. State health care services are weak, and CARE serves former GOS areas of the State with a network of 5 clinics (Note: NGOs who work from Nairobi service many of the rural areas that have been consistently under SPLM control. End note.) MSF/F is focusing their medical work on specialized tuberculosis and Kala Azar clinics, while ACF/F is handling the nutrition sector with a small wat/san and food security component in Rubkona/Bentiu. World Relief, operating from Nairobi, is one of several NGOs providing health support in the rural parts of the northern counties and plans under new funding from USAID to move some of their activities to the towns that are hosting large numbers of returnees.

¶16. An oil-company constructed hospital opened in Bentiu in late 2005, but is staffed and equipped very poorly according to the NGOs and UN. Nonetheless, the one doctor is able to deal with difficult obstetric cases, saving the long trip to the next closest hospital at Heglig.

¶17. Provision of potable water is the most critical task facing the state now that the displaced are returning in droves. The problem is particularly acute in the Rubkona/Bentiu urban zone, where water near the surface is too salty and further down has been tested as too contaminated for human consumption. Wells must be drilled to at least 200 meters to obtain "sweet water." In the case of the Rubkona/Bentiu, filtering water from the Nile is the most logical intervention over the long term, but at present there is only a small system that provides a fraction of the town's needs. As with Juba, if potable water issues are not addressed, larger-scale outbreaks of diarrheal disease could be anticipated in the near future, leading to a large-scale emergency. Various partners, including USAID partner PACT and ACF/F, are engaged in the water sector, but the pace of drilling is not keeping up with the needs of the population.

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